

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

## **Ecoregion 62 (North Central Appalachia) Observations**

On July 14 and 15, 1999 we visited 9 of 10 sample blocks that were randomly selected for the North Central Appalachia ecoregion (62). This ecoregion is disjunct, with a smaller polygon in southern New York and a larger polygon in central Pennsylvania. The North Central Appalachian ecoregion is typically mountainous and forested with several rivers and streams bisecting the ecoregion (particularly in central Pennsylvania). The land cover of the ecoregion is mostly forest, though a small percent of land is covered by water bodies (lakes and streams), urban and built-up features, and agriculture. The land cover of this ecoregion appears to be largely static with very few signs of dynamic conditions. The following is a brief summary of the four land cover types observed during our field traverse.

### Forest Land

As stated, forest cover dominates the ecoregion and likely occupies more than 90% of the area. Forest cover vast contiguous portions of the hills, with very little observed fragmentation. It appears that much of the area, particularly in Pennsylvania, is in public ownership (National Forests, State Forest Land). Forest characteristics were generally consistent in all sample blocks. Oak and hickory species were most common, but maple and birch were also observed. Evergreen needleleaf tree species were also found, but in stands that occupied very little area.

The Landsat scenes covering the samples displayed numerous patterns of forest canopy defoliation and storm damage. While we saw isolated patches of degraded forest, the cause of the degraded condition could not be determined.

While we did not see active logging or observe thinned or cleared land, we saw ample evidence of logging and forest products industry. This included trucks hauling logs, small sawmills, and paper and pallet factories. The amount of logging and extent of wood industry seemed to be greatest in the Pennsylvania samples.

### Water Bodies

Small natural lakes were found throughout the area. Both large rivers (Allegheny and Susquehanna) and small streams flow through the ecoregion. Recreational uses of the water bodies were common.

### Urban Lands

The extent of urban and built up land cover was small. This land cover was typically found in two ways. First, small towns are scattered along the highways that bisect the ecoregion. The towns were typically very small (population < 500) though a few small

cities with populations between 5000 and 10,000 can be found. The small towns did not appear to be expanding as there was virtually now evidence of new housing, commerce, or industry. The small cities showed limited evidence of growth, though the areas of new development were not large. Most notable were new low density residential housing and commercial strip developments.

The second type of urban and built up cover was recreational housing in rural areas. Both isolated and clustered fishing and hunting camps were observed. These were usually along streams and underdeveloped highways. The housing in Pennsylvania appeared to be seasonal and lower value (i.e., mobile homes, small cabins), but in New York, the housing appeared to be permanent residences. The recreational housing appears to be stable and most of the development looked like it was established at least 30 years ago. There was little evidence that this sector is growing.

### Agriculture

Cropland and pasture was found in isolated patches. The land area used for agriculture is minimal. Corn and hay production, and pasture for grazing (especially for dairy herds) were noted. This sector did not appear to changing in area or character.